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Dr Erin Johnson-Williams

Book Review: *Musics of the Free State: Reflections on a Musical Past, Present and Future*, ed. Martina Viljoen (Zagreb: Croatian Musicological Society, 2015).

Musics of the Free State: Reflections on a Musical Past, Present, and Future, edited by Martina Viljoen, is undoubtedly a post-Apartheid publication. Bringing together scholars from South Africa and the USA, this unique collection of essays provides multifaceted narratives of the same area – and, overwhelmingly, of the same city, Bloemfontein – from the perspectives of cultural musicology, institutional history, ethnomusicology, and music analysis. The ‘collective memory’ that the book as a whole recollects, is of a complex, largely ‘off-the-map’ (83) region of South Africa where musical practices can provide a critical lens through which to examine and contemplate the implications of race, class, and segregation in a region’s musical practices. Even in the several chapters (Moll, N. Viljoen, de Villiers, Thom Wium, and Coetzee) which focus on the traditionally white practice of Western classical music – a tradition that is clearly very strong and important to those who practice it, and yet, as identified in the chapter by Frelét de Villiers, is still cultivated and patronised by a small number of largely white music lovers – the willingness to move on from the segregated history of Apartheid, and to create dialogues of reconciliation in discussion of musical practice, is a driving force behind all chapters. As such, the levels of complexity addressed in this publication outline the many ways in which music can represent, challenge and reinforce indigeneity (M. Viljoen and Gcisa), social mobility (de Villiers), race and national identity (Barz), a means of geo-specific communal socialization (Cloete), and rigorous institutional strategy (Coetzee). As such, the wide range of approaches applied here, from ethnography (Cloete, de Villiers, Barz) to music analysis (Thom Wium) to institutional planning (Coetzee) is commendable and could be considered a model for similar edited collections centred around a specific geo-political setting.

The structure of the book begins and ends with the cultural institutions of Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State. Although this city is referred to several times as being ‘off the map’ (Cloete), it clearly possesses rich potential for musicological interest – not least when it is revealed that this city has roads with names such as Mozart Street, Bach Street, Beethoven Street and Brahms Street (122). Following a captivating forward by Dale Cockrell on freedom, identity and musical meaning post-1994, Johan Moll’s history of musical institutions opens the volume with a comprehensive history of the local area, its population, and the birth of music festivals and institutions in Bloemfontein. Recognising ‘culture as an historical phenomenon,’ Moll contextualises the history of racial segregation in these practices – such as historically separate music festivals for black and white musicians – with a thoughtful assessment of diversity, noting continued efforts towards integration. Nicol Viljoen’s history of the Free State Orchestral Training Programme locates the growth of Western classical music within South Africa’s long history of music examination and school training systems, and the post-1994 changes to this system. The success of these movements saw the birth of a now-residential string quartet at the Odeion School of Music, and a strong history of music education in the Free State. While the vast majority of orchestral practice was by white residents, his research has unearthed a surprising diversity of practices: for example, the brief existence of a local Chinese orchestra using indigenous

Chinese instruments with the help of the Odeion School of Music students, produced a short-lived orchestra of fascinating hybridity (77).

Elene Cloete's geo-ethnography of three spaces for live music in Bloemfontein deserves special mention, providing a remarkably vivid account of a journey through specific urban intersections, to give an account of the 'urban dynamics of the city ... in particular, historical remembrances, contemporary enterprises associated with people's movement through the city, and images and perceptions of daily city life' (84). Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this chapter provides a nuanced assessment of the cultural meanings of the concept of cultural 'entanglement,' where musical meaning can have multiple racial and social implications, so that music in public spaces is no longer experienced only as white, black or coloured. As a striking complementary counterpart to Cloete's article, Gregory Barz's ethnography of jazz musicians in Heidedal – traditionally, a 'coloured' township of Bloemfontein – discusses even some of the same locations as Cloete's, and, similarly, opens with the experience of driving through the city. Drawing upon interviews, Barz situates his 'outsider' position to reassess the local and the national in post-Apartheid coloured music-making, as well as the prejudicial assumptions that ethnomusicologists often take to studies of identity.

Moving then inside the institution of the Odeion School of Music, Frelét de Villiers employs interviews and 'ethnographic photography' as a means of assessing the musical life of the Odeion School of Music, examining the often-sparse audiences for classical music today. Interviews generally found that the audiences often consisted of the same, mostly-white concert-goers. The use of photography as an interpretive lens for social meaning was an affecting indicator of the personal investment of regular attendees at these events, and of a growing conversation about diversification. Martina Viljoen and Bonisile Gcisa's chapter examines the history of black choral singing in the Free State, tracing Gcisa's efforts to document and interpret indigenous song, and to expand the musical notational practices out of tonic sol-fa notation into staff notation to widen the scope of musical education in local education programmes. This chapter specifically recognises the ongoing importance of black communal song, noting that the documentation of this music will raise awareness of indigenous song as 'a profoundly influential tool for healing,' not only as a 'living chronicle of suffering, but, ultimately, also of acceptance, and of hope' (223).

Mathilde Thom Wium's thoughtful analysis of Stefans Grove's *The Soul Bird Trio* is admirable in balancing a close reading of the musical material with a strong socio-cultural and hermeneutic underpinning, carefully situating the place of a white-Afrikaans musical fantasy of 'Africa' within a discourse of reconciliation. Thom Wium's identification of narrative and landscape in this work is evocative, and, if reading the chapters in order, one can now mentally picture the Bloemfontein institutions in which this work would still be appreciated. Martina Viljoen's study of Afrikaaner alternative rock transports us to another location for live music: the Vulture Club, which serves 'soul' food. Here, a specifically Afrikaans voice is expressed in song, articulating the ambiguous anxieties of what is compellingly theorised as a 'postapartheid white identity' (282), which offers a chance to deconstruct older conceptions of whiteness and create new interpretive pathways in the space between 'forgetting and remembering' (303). Finally, Marius Coetzee's 'strategic repositioning' of the Odeion School of Music discusses the institutional restructurings that have occurred within

this music faculty in recent years in order to accommodate changes in the tertiary music education sector. This article would be useful to academics who are involved in departmental restructurings, as it provides a clear strategy for institutional excellence and innovation.

I am sad to confess, I have never been to Bloemfontein. Yet, after reading this book, I feel that I almost know this city, its townships, nightclubs and music venues, the history of its education programmes, and the diverse interests of the faculty at the Odeion School of Music with their willingness to, as Martina Viljoen writes, 'find the way forward to effectively manage the ongoing, transitional process in our complex, multicultural society' (vii). The strength of the book lies in the richness of engagement with the musical practices of the local. The heavy concentration in Bloemfontein, however, may also be its weakness in living up to its title, as the vast majority of essays are about the city, rather than the broader region of the Free State and its other towns. I was left wondering, what might a more 'rural' musical perspective have contributed? Would the significance of sacred music – addressed in the chapter by M. Viljoen and Gcisa, and clearly so integral to the history of black South African music – have then played a greater role in the book? Furthermore, in a publication which addresses the issue of race so directly, it is notable that most (although not all) of the authors are white with a background in Western classical music. Of course, this is not an imbalance that is new to musicology – raising, yet again, the vital issue of diversity in inviting people to the study of music, both within and beyond South Africa. *Musics of the Free State* highlights many of these important questions, displaying poignantly how Western classical music, South African art music compositions, jazz, alternative rock, and indigenous song can be in dialogue in one locality through ever-complex networks of meaning.